

Helping Youth Make Informed and Considered Career Decisions: Guidance for Parents and Caregivers

Today's youth will need high-level work-related and career management skills if they are to successfully navigate contemporary workplace demands. Career management skills include the ability to quickly change jobs or even careers, to manage periods of unemployment, to decide which skills to acquire to compete, and to market one's self effectively. Parents can play an important role in preparing their child for a labor market that is fast changing, highly competitive, and global.

A parent's influence can range from helping a young child to understand her strengths and talents to later supporting and advising her in negotiating the complex world of postsecondary planning and decision-making or even in marketing herself effectively. The importance of parent involvement in a child's career development cannot be minimized and in today's climate is more important than ever.

Current estimates are that one in six workers will change jobs in any given year. Parents must communicate a value for rigorous education and encourage their child to take advanced coursework especially in mathematics, science, and technology. In order to thrive in the 21st century workplace, a young person will need up-to-date and reliable information and know-how to make informed and considered career decisions.

The good news is that this information is highly accessible and free!

Most schools and many public libraries and agencies have career information and services that can provide critical assistance to parents and older youth in career planning and career development. Career information includes information about occupations, industries, education and training programs and providers, financial aid, decision-making, and job seeking. It comes from a variety of sources. High quality career information is distinguished by its readability, accuracy, audience appropriateness, and compliance with industry standards. It is vital to have good career information in making informed and considered career decisions. Professional counselors can help students and parents in understanding and using career information.

One of the most important tools available to parents for helping young people to think critically about their place in the work world is the career information delivery system (CIDS).

CIDS combine various types of up-to-date career information and provide assessment and search capabilities. There are many national and state systems available through schools, workforce development offices, libraries and technical colleges and universities. The presence of a valuable tool does not necessarily mean that the child will use the tool.

So, what can you do?

Guide your child in exploring and using career planning information and services. If he is willing, do it alongside him. If not, explore the CIDS for yourself and share what YOU have learned. Communicate the expectation that he access career information and services wherever they are available. Let him know that in many instances, counselors, even city librarians will guide and assist him in using career planning tools. Explain the benefits of using such tools to identify interests, work values, strengths, abilities, and aptitudes. Encourage him to explore his career interests through school activities such as internships or coop and through more informal activities such as touring a college or workplace.

While you can do much to assist and encourage your child, research shows that career information delivered by counselors is much more powerful than information by itself. Therefore, speak to your child's principal about the school's career development programs and career guidance services. This is true at the elementary as well as the high school level. School counselors, for example, should guide students of all ages through important career planning processes, including self awareness (truly knowing their career interests, aptitudes, and work values); career exploration (through activities, games, reading about occupations, researching education and training requirements); and career planning and decision-making (developing a career plan, narrowing choices, and identifying a postsecondary goal.)

Start early! Even elementary students can understand that the many desirable jobs -- those that offer higher pay, more generous benefits, the possibility of growth, variety, and challenge -- require education and training beyond high school.

Finally, talk with your child about the important concept of work satisfaction. That is, that she can and will find work that suits her well and leads to satisfaction, fulfillment, and high achievement. This will occur only 'if' she takes the time to make an informed and considered career decision, which she will surely do with good career information and your help!

Additional Resources:

- To identify your state's CIDS, go to www.acrnetwork.org/network.htm
- To identify national systems, go to <http://acsci.org/Survey/vendor.asp>.
- For more on making informed and considered career decisions, go to www.acrna.net/publications/iccd-sub1.pdf
- For more information on parental involvement activities, go to www.acrnetwork.org/parents.aspx

